



## “It Is Hard to Choose”: An Italian Author on Migration, Diaspora, African Literature, and the Limits of Labels

*Igiaba Scego and Saskia Ziolkowski*

Igiaba Scego is an Italian author of novels, memoirs, and short stories that have been central to debates in Italy about migration, colonialism, postcolonialism, racism, and women’s writings. Scego was born in Rome in 1974 to a family of Somali ancestry. Her short story “Salsicce” (“Sausages”) was awarded the Eks & Tra prize for migrant writing in 2003. Giovanna Bellesia and Victoria Offredi Poletto translated this now famous story into English (2005). Scego’s memoir *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home Is Where I am*, 2010) won Italy’s prestigious Mondello Prize. She has also edited a number of volumes, including *Italiani per vocazione* (2005, with works by authors who moved to Italy), *Anche Superman era un rifugiato* (2018, a collection which underscores connections between refugees over time), and *Future: il domani narrato dalle voci di oggi* (2019, a collection by Black Italian women authors). Her non-fiction appears in venues such as *The Guardian*, *World Literature Today*, *Internazionale*, and *Corriere della Sera*. Her work as an educator frequently takes her into

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classrooms from universities in the United States to high schools in Italy. She holds a PhD in education from Roma Tre University.

Scego describes her latest novels, *Oltre Babilonia* (2008), *Adua* (2015), and *La linea del colore* (2020), as a “trilogy of colonial violence.” All three have been translated into English: *Beyond Babylon* (2019) by Aaron Robertson, *Adua* (2017) by Jamie Richards, and *The Color Line* (2022) by John Cullen and Gregory Conti. *The Color Line* weaves together the story of a Black artist, Lafanu Brown, who leaves the United States in the Civil War period, for Italy, which is in the process of unifying, with the story of Leila, a curator in contemporary Italy who reflects on migration in terms of art, her family attempting to leave Somalia, and Lafanu Brown. Scego’s explanatory notes, her introductions to edited volumes, and her articles map intellectual spaces and bibliographies, many of whose references also appear in this interview. They include the historian Angelo Del Boca’s three-volume *Gli italiani in Africa orientale* (1976, 1979, 1982), a starting point for the study of Italian colonialism; the historian Francesco Filippi’s writings on colonialism, fascism, and their afterlives; Francesca Melandri’s 2017 novel *Sangue Giusto* and its portrayal of the legacies of colonialism in Italy; and Maaza Mengiste’s novel *The Shadow King*, which explores Italian colonialism in Ethiopia. Like Scego’s non-fiction, Scego’s fiction brings together different literary traditions (European, American, and African) and histories, often to reflect on Italy’s past, present, and future. Her most recent work, *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* (2023), was nominated by Jhumpa Lahiri for Italy’s prestigious Strega Prize.

The interview was conducted in English in October 2021 via Zoom by Saskia Ziolkowski of Duke University, where Igiaba Scego was a visiting scholar in Fall 2022. It has been edited for length.

**Saskia Ziolkowski: You have a Ph.D. in postcolonial and migration education. Loescher has published a version of your *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home Is Where I am*, 2010) with pedagogical notes and materials to make it easier to teach. Your collection *Anche Superman era un rifugiato: Storie vere per cambiare il mondo* (*Superman was a refugee too: True stories to change the world*, 2018) is aimed at a younger audience. Recently you published *Figli dello stesso cielo: Il razzismo e il colonialismo raccontati ai ragazzi* (*Under the Same Sky: Racism and Colonialism Narrated to Children*, 2021). What are the challenges of writing about migration and colonialism for a younger audience? What do you think about for a younger audience that you might not with an older one?**

Igiaba Scego: I published *Figli dello stesso cielo* about colonialism: it is basically about my grandfather and me, but in the book, I am eleven years old, not forty-seven years old, like I am now. The grandfather speaks about colonialism, including his experiences during liberal Italian colonialism and Fascist Italian colonialism. It is more for young adults, middle-schoolers. He explains and defines colonialism. He explains the scramble for Africa, human zoos, and

songs like "Faccetta nera."<sup>1</sup> It is interesting for Italian teenagers and university students learning Italian. The language and style are quite easy to understand. I wrote this book because there is a big gap, a hole, in Italian schools in terms of colonialism. From Columbus to later European and Italian colonialism, it is four-hundred years of our history and so important. The connections between the western world and the global south, what happened? It was a big crash. Our world is in the process of dealing with what happened. In our books for middle-schoolers and teenagers in Italy, no one speaks about colonialism. It is incredible that there are four-hundred years of colonialism and only maybe a few lines in a school textbook. For that reason, I wrote a book for this age group, so students will discuss this period. There are many books right now, Francesca Melandri's wonderful novel *Sangue giusto* or Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. We also have historians like Francesco Filippi and Angelo Del Boca, but no works for children and teenagers. This was very important for me. It is difficult.

**SZ: What are the challenges for a younger audience?**

IS: It is challenging, but I know that the students want to know. I have done presentations with teenagers. Classes are so diverse in Italy now, not like in the United States or the UK, but the students come from different parts of the world and have different backgrounds. There are a lot of discussions about racism in schools. It is very interesting for me as well. I learn a lot from the teenagers' questions. It is a good exchange of views. The challenge is not teenagers or children, but the instructors, who need to know more than the teenagers. They need to be trained in this history. The problem is that everyone teaching in Italy, or 99%, are white. It is not easy to explain everything. At school, they understand a little bit now about the Shoah, but colonialism is still a big deal for schools right now. This is my challenge because I want people to write books and have discussions in schools about this topic.

**SZ: So the challenge is not the writing but getting it to circulate to the schools, the audience is already there?**

IS: The audience of all my books in a way is young people, the new generation. I want to discuss all this stuff, about migration. I went back into migration with *La linea del colore*, which will be coming out in English. I am curious to see the reactions of the American audience to the novel. In "Making Of" [the afterword to *The Color Line*] I explain that I have an African American character, not as an appropriation but as a sort of connection to the story of slavery, of the United States, and also of colonialism here in Italy, of travel, and the Grand Tour. I worked a lot on this issue in *La linea del colore* and

<sup>1</sup>See Scego's essay on this popular, Mussolini-era song, "The True Story of 'Faccetta Nera,'" translated by Anthony Shugaar for *Words without Borders*.

nineteenth-century imperialism; now I need to come back to Somalia, to the diaspora. When I think about my life, it is inside the diaspora. I was born in Italy, my parents were born in Mogadishu. I have brothers and sisters who live abroad, in the United States, the UK, Canada, Nairobi; I have relatives in Finland and Sweden. These connections are my life. These connections also mean travel is my life. The diaspora lives the connection, thanks to airplanes, phone calls, Whatsapp, thanks to technology. With COVID-19, something broke. You could not even think about getting on an airplane. 2020 was horrible. I understand the meaning of living in a web, the web is the internet and also our life, the diaspora, with feelings, connections, family. COVID-19 changed a lot of our feelings and our way of thinking about life. We find something more connected to our stage of life. We want to be free to be ourselves.

In my writing, I want to come back to Somalia, although it is sometimes sad. Two weeks ago, my sister-in-law lost her aunt because al-Shabaab [a jihadist group based in Somalia] killed her. Every day something horrible happens, not just in the country, but also next to you, in your family. Usually, old ladies love to stay outside and see people. These two young boys came and shot her in the head. When my sister-in-law told me that story, I said, “I am so sorry about your aunt.” It is something that happens and is not new. There have been thirty years of civil war, terrorism, bad news. I want to work on the past of Somalia, from 1960s to the civil war and afterward, to explore what happened to the families. This is a big challenge.

I don’t want to write about terrorism and al-Shabaab, but about the diaspora. I think we are all involved in it. Maybe above all, with COVID, something happened to me. I want to go back to Somalia but with Italy inside. It isn’t just my experience because I was born here, but it is the experience of a lot of people. For many people, the first time they travel abroad it is to Italy, because of colonialism, because of AFIS [Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana in Somalia, the Italian Trusteeship Administration in Somalia] returning to Somalia. We are connected, with Italian pop music and Italian cinema. My two countries are really connected. Of course, I show that in *La linea del colore* as well, but I want to show more of this. It is like with *Beyond Babylon*. When I read *Beyond Babylon* now, it is strange for me, because I was so young. Now I have changed. It is part of writing literature, which can be quite hard to do in Italy. Because in the United States or UK they understand more the connections with African people and people in the diaspora.

In Italy, Black people are only called on to speak about racism and we are more than that. Racism is something of course that all Black people experience, but we have different lives. They put a lot of Black people together only because of their skin color, not because of their literature. I am so happy that there are so many younger writers now. It is an interesting moment, but we have different experiences. One thing that I would love is for the world of literature in Italy to treat us like they treat other writers. They think, “they are Black, they have the same issues, same feelings,” but we do not have the same feelings. We

are so different from each other, in origin, age, and where we are from in Italy. We are also different in terms of our African routes, horn of African, sub-Saharan African, or from Maghreb, we need to understand the differences inside Black people. This is important and quite, quite difficult in Italy, because there is a lack, a big gap in terms of experience of otherness and different literatures. When Abdulrazak Gurnah won the Nobel prize [in 2021], everyone in the world asked "who is Gurnah?" But the problem here is also the limited experience of African literature and of Afro-descendant literature. For example, at the book fair in Frankfurt, they gave a big prize to Tsitsi Dangarembga, yet her trilogy is impossible to find in Italian translation. Tsitsi Dangarembga's first book was translated by a small publisher called Gorée, a really wonderful press. They publish a lot of African literature. None of the big publishers in Italy published her, even though she is really important and a pillar of African literature. When I read *Nervous Conditions*, the first book of hers I read, I understood that I wanted to be a writer. She changed my life. It is so incredible that no one in Italy knew her.

**SZ: Has your relationship to migration as a literary theme altered since your "Salsicce" ("Sausages") was awarded the Eks & Tra prize for migrant writing in 2003? What changes in the relationship between migration and literature have happened between then and now in Italy?**

IS: Society is more open. They want to fight for human rights and citizenship legislation. Society is better, although we have white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and we are in trouble, but there are movements amongst young people, especially feminists. The problem is in the intelligentsia, publishers, and the media system, we have a lack of representation. It is quite difficult to find literature published by different people, Black, brown, or by people with other origins, say Chinese, instead it is all white. Our environment is all white, which is crazy. It is difficult to place new things. I am lucky because I have found good people, which is important for a writer, but the system is closed. We need to create the conditions to change the system, meaning the schools, universities, opportunities, talent scouts, publishing, and publishers. These kinds of things also have to do with the media, our newspapers, television, radio programs, and all cultural systems.

The problem is not only our skin or our religion but also our class. You have these interconnections of race and class. I am a daughter of a refugee. My father and mother were rich in Somalia, but they lost all their money, possessions, and connections as refugees. My father was a politician, a minister, and ambassador. He lost all that, he cannot be a politician in another country. It is difficult to recreate yourself. As a refugee, everything disappears. When I was a child and teenager I was so poor. When I say poor, I mean for real. My mom and I went to Caritas, a charity, to find something to eat, pasta, or clothes. I remember that was quite hard. Then it changed a little bit. The only thing that I had was public school, without which I would not have written books. A

good education was the key to my life. I know I am lucky because I was born in a moment when school could change your life, even in Italy, where the rich families of the Renaissance are still the rich families now, say in Florence or Venice. I remember in Venice I met a family that I had studied in a painting, they were rich and they are rich. UK and Italy are two countries where class is very fixed. For me, the problem with representation is not only race but also class. We have to create the environment to find people, to tell them they have an opportunity. There are a lot of intelligent second-generation people that have the problems that I had as a child and teenager: they are intelligent but without connections. It is like in Jane Austen's novel when they say, if you don't have connections, you are nobody. It's the same story. In a democracy, you have to create opportunities for people.

**SZ: In English there are debates about the terms “migration literature,” “migrant literature,” “exile literature,” “refugee” among others that are sometimes seen as reflecting class differences. Some say “exile” potentially has to do with class, whereas “refugee” or “migrant” literature are from a lower class. How do you feel about these terms? Do you have favorite terms or terms you would avoid using to describe migration and literature in Italian? What about for the categorization of your own work? You were born in Rome, but sometimes are called a “migration author” or “second generation” migrant author.**

IS: I think I am given the label “migration author” because of my background, not the content of my literature. I think the label is a problem and an opportunity. When I began to write, “migration literature” was at a good point. Pap Khouma had been published a few years before. When I arrived, I found a lot of people who were writing literature, labeled “migration,” like Kossi Komla-Ebri, Amara Lakhous, Tahar Lamri, and Cristina Ali Farah. In that moment it was a key with which I could enter literature. Labels are something outside of us. When I think of myself, I think, I am Igiaba, I am a writer. I try to do my best with my work. I experience big crises when I write. I would love to write faster. Sometimes more commitments are dangerous.

Labels are more for academia or the media. “Second-generation” means nothing, second-generation people are so different as I said before. When people call me “second-generation,” I think of children but I am forty-seven, I have had a lot of experiences of Italy. I remember the 1980s of Italy. I remember the Berlin Wall, Brezhnev, and Carter. Second-generation puts together a lot of people with different issues. It's a label that I do not love. It's not my migration, I was born in Rome. I feel more like a diasporic writer. It is a better fit. No one calls me that, but I feel like I am a product of the diaspora. If I had to choose one label, one word for me, maybe “diaspora” would be the best one, because you do not need to travel. The people traveled for you and suffered for you. You suffer in a different way, but you are involved in an environment of diaspora. And, of course, I write Italian literature, another label that I

love and that people sometimes use, but sometimes they do not use it because I am Black.

I love African literature, but my literature is not African literature. When I edited the volume *Africana* with Chiara Piaggio, it was amazing. I wrote in the preface, I am not African, I would like to be, but I am an Afro-descendant. I was born in Europe, I grew up in Europe. I have experienced Mogadishu because I would go sometimes in the summer and I did a year and a half there in middle school. I did not have the experience of my parents or brothers. I feel more Afro-European. When I interviewed Bernardine Evaristo, I said, “you speak about the European experience.” I love *Girl, Woman, Other*. We live the same thing in a way, being Black in a white-majority country. It is different in Africa, you are Black in a multicultural society, but the majority in most countries is Black, so racism is not the issue—there are other problems and other kinds of racism but white and Black is not the main issue. My experience is being Black, being Muslim, being a woman in a patriarchal, majority white society. This is what being an Afro-European woman means. Europe is a difficult concept. Africa is easy, it is like a big mother; in Africa you try to understand the differences between the countries. Mali and Somalia are not the same, Somalia isn’t Nigeria. But for me the first thing about Europe is colonialism, they created their richness from it. But I am European. European identity is not always easy, but it is part of my life. For me, it is easier to be Roman than European. Europe is big and white and up and down, but when I think about my identity, I feel part-African, part-Italian, and Roman, from my city. It is not the same to be from northern Europe or southern Europe. I feel more connected to Spain and Portugal than Norway. I studied Spanish literature at the university.

**SZ:** The different categories you are sharing are also different ways one could consider your novels. While your works can be approached in terms of global narrative movements (or multi-perspectival novels, *Americanah* or *Girl, Woman, Other*), they also build on strong Italian literary traditions that are reflected in your writing. Your literature could also be put in productive dialogue with Italo Calvino, Elsa Morante, or Dante, among many others. Which Italian authors or traditions have been influential for you?

IS: Italy is my country. I of course think about literature, but the main thing that I think about in terms of Italy is the cinema. When I think about the people who affected my literature, I think about Germi, Fellini, Monicelli. I love Monicelli. I met Monicelli at the university once when he was around ninety years old. He spoke about Somalia, he said, “I went to Somalia, I know Mogadishu.” It was amazing to speak with Monicelli about my country of origin. It was a special afternoon with Monicelli and Scarpelli. Another big director we briefly spoke with was Ettore Scola. Ettore Scola was so intelligent and wise. I love *Una giornata particolare*, with Sophia Loren and Marcello

Mastroianni. I love him, I think everyone in the world does. In *Una giornata particolare*, my favorite film, there is a special friendship, with intimacy. The director put together history and intimacy, which I try to do in my novels. I love Nino Manfredi, Franca Valeri, whom I also met. She was amazing, ironic. I met all these people that I had seen on television when they were in their nineties. Another person I love is Monica Vitti.

Movies are the language of my family, which I tried to explain in *Adua*. I didn't speak about my family in the novel, but I tried to explain what movies meant for them. My mother was nomadic, they were shepherds. She could read a little bit but could not write. There were no books in her life. My father used to read detective stories. I remember my house was full of detective stories, not only Agatha Christie, but also Dickson Carr. He was famous because the murderer was inside a closed room, it was like an enigma. I read spy stories, Le Carré and Ken Follett. These were the works I had at home. I read detective stories from all over the world, including Ellery Queen.

I remember the language my father and mother had with me and each other were of movies. They watched a lot of movies. My father loved Westerns. Though Westerns are often terrible, when I was young I loved one with Glen Ford that I saw with my father. We also watched Hollywood movies, for instance with Audrey Hepburn. One of the movies my mother watched all the time was *Gone with the Wind*. I hated this movie, and when I was a teenager I asked her why she watched it so often. She said, it is horrible, but she liked the dresses. My mother loves elegant dresses. One of the series she loves now is *Downton Abbey* too, which is also imperialist. I remember it felt humiliating when I saw *Gone with the Wind*, especially because the Mamie character is dubbed terribly in Italian. Another movie my mother watched a lot was Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* about the Black history of passing, with Lana Turner. In the film, a daughter of a Black maid tries to pass as white. My mom is so interested in historic Black people and there weren't a lot of Black people on television. I will have to ask her if this is why she watched these movies with African Americans. My mom also bought me *Malcolm X*. People have a lot of parts.

**SZ: You mentioned intimacy in terms of why you love films. Do you start with one character or relationship in your novels? You always have multiple characters with intense relationships.**

IS: In your projects, you want to change styles. I want to change every time, but I need many voices to create one voice. The character is usually just one, but this character is a pillar for a world. It is not the novel of one character, but a huge history. I need a pillar to create the other characters in the novel. I need a variety of voices, because this is what diaspora means, with family connections or even people we know in school.

**SZ:** You have so much history in your novels. The historical and bibliographic notes that appear in your novels were originally intended for Italian readers, but are also extremely useful for an English-language audience, for whom elements of Italian history, especially in terms of migration, colonialism, and racism, can be unknown. Your works build on a range of archival sources that make them visible to a wide audience. What two or three things would you most want your audience reading you in English-language translations to know about migration and Italian or Somali history before starting your works?

IS: My novels explain a lot because I do not expect people to know the history. I am a teacher and writer together. The reactions outside of Italy to my book are amazing, especially in Brazil and the United States, two countries that are so different and so similar. They both lived the slave-trade and Black issues are big in both countries.

**SZ:** What are some of the surprises in terms of critics or readers from the United States or Brazil? A number of translators have brought your work to English readers, with Jamie Richardson's *Adua*, Aaron Robertson's *Beyond Babylon*, Giovana Bellesia and Victoria Offredi Poletto's "Sausages," Hugh Shankland's "Exmatriates," Frederika Randall's excerpt from *Caetano Veloso*, Barbara Ofosu-Somuah and Candice Whitney are translating *Future*, and John Cullen and Gregory Conti's *The Color Line*. These translations have had great popular and critical success in English. Have there been any surprises in terms of how English-language readers or scholars respond to your work, as compared to Italian readers?

IS: The surprise is finding readers. I think, "this is Somali-Italian history." Italian writers and Italian literature are not a big market. When you write in Italian, you know that your market is little. You speak with your audience and you try to speak with the world, but you know that your instrument, the Italian language, is not a big instrument. There are very few prizes for you, no Man Booker Prize. For all Italian writers, it is amazing when we find people interested in our work. It is so wonderful to create this relationship. I understand that I speak about Italy and Somalia, so outside of the big market—outside the big galaxy of literature, but people all over the world have many of the same problems, feelings, and issues that I have. Sometimes the same character in my book appears in Brazilian and American literature, in a Brazilian or American way. I began to create connections with Brazilian and American authors and academia. This is amazing for me because I understand that we are all together. Of course, my instrument is Italian and I love the Italian language. It is my language. When people ask me why I don't write in the Somali language, it is because it is the spoken language of family and the diaspora. My writing from

the beginning, from the first day, has been in Italian. The Somali language is inside my Italian, including the experiences of my mother, who is nomadic but is a poet. These oral traditions and nomadic background enter into my creations and characters. My multiple voices in a way come from oral literature.

For that reason, I am so happy when I see authors from other countries because we exchange experiences. With the United States and Brazil, I also have a connection with the languages because I know English and Portuguese. The exchange is a real exchange because I read the authors in their languages. One of my dreams is to translate Portuguese. They have so many Black authors that I love, like Conceição Evaristo. People do not know her but she is the queen of African Brazilian literature. When I met her, I was amazed. I knew her before my book was translated into Portuguese. One of my dreams is to translate Brazilian literature into Italian because people often do not know anything about Brazil. They know about the United States, but not Brazilian literature. The success of African American literature in Italy is interesting because it is something new. James Baldwin is big for Black intellectuals, but many people in Italy began to learn about him because of Black Lives Matter. Because of the success of people like Colson Whitehead, Italians understand something about the United States and also about us, about Afro-Italians. I am happy to have connections to these two countries.

**SZ: Do you think Afro-Italian identity is sometimes read through a lens of African-American identity?**

IS: In a way, after Black Lives Matter, they began to see us differently. People know us, me, Cristina Ali Farah, for our novels of course, but not for the meaning of our novels. Something happened with Black Lives Matter. New voices enter into the literature. Djarah Kan is so powerful. She experienced the South of Italy (Caserta, Naples), the Global South, and she's Italian and Ghanaian too. Even people who do not know anything about these histories, they hear the power of her voice. It is a good moment to speak about this, but there is a danger to see us as activists. We are not activists, we are writers.

**SZ: Scholars discuss your literature in the context of so many different topics, including migration, colonialism, racism, feminism, food studies, Somalia, and Italy, among others. Each topic puts your work in dialogue with somewhat different authors. In “Making of” after *La linea del colore* you describe *Oltre Babilonia*, *Adua*, and *La linea del colore* as a “trilogia della violenza coloniale” (“trilogy of colonial violence”). Migration also plays a crucial role in these novels. Would calling them a “trilogy of migration” also be appropriate? How does an emphasis on migration change which authors you see yourself in conversation with or how you think of your work?**

IS: Of course, at the beginning of all the stories is migration. There is more migration than colonialism in *Adua*, with a migrant woman. *La linea del colore* is the history of travel, there are two stories, both with migration, or the dream of migration for the Somali woman and the realization of the dream for Lafanu Brown. Migration is not just part of my background, but something important that happens to society. It is part of our contemporary world, not only our world today but always. Now it is so big and in front of us. When people think about climate change, I think about climate refugees. People escape from Somalia not only because of the war but also because of the lack of fish in the ocean, drought, and starvation. It is connected to climate change. It is clear that migration is a huge part of society. The big and sad thing is the construction of the wall between us. We live in rich countries, in the rich part of the world, but the really rich part of the world is the global south, but they were exploited. What happened in Sudan is so scary. In the horn of Africa, around the dam of the Nile, there is a big geopolitical war between Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea. When I see what happened, I think it is important to explain from the point of view of migration, what it means to a family, for love affairs. I work on this and I want to work more. Sometimes here in Italy, people say "you write about migration, now write about something else." I do not want to change, it is important to understand, it is research, which needs time and different ways of thinking. The phenomena change with you. The migration of my parents in the 1970s is not the migration of today. Things change in the world. I am happy that people study my book in different departments, even food with "Sausages." I think it is normal, in one book you find a lot of different things. Writers spend a lot of time on different things for their work. For *La linea del colore*, I studied dress. I discovered fashion was so different in the 1880s and 1890s. There are two pages about widow's dress. In a novel, you study a lot of things. It isn't just one topic.

**SZ: This interest in dress is like your mother's with film.**

IS: There is an audiobook of *La linea del colore*, maybe my mother will listen to it. I chose the actress Esther Elisha, a Benin-Italian actress. I wanted a Black woman to read this book. Translation is a free world. I do not need a translator to have the same skin as me, but sometimes I would like to have a translator with my color because we exchange experiences about what it means to be Black in Europe or the United States. I did this with Aaron Robertson. He was so interesting for me. I learned a lot from him. Sometimes if there is a possibility to match people together, it can be a good experience. I hope one day to work again with Aaron. There are so few opportunities for Black translators from the Italian language. Italian language and work can be so white. It can be interesting to have something different.

**SZ:** Critics have said migration prompts narration or that literary history is a history of migration, which in the past was primarily told from a male perspective. Many of your female protagonists are storytellers, artists, and creators. How does the gender of your protagonists contribute to their relationship between art and migration? Or how do you think this relationship, between gender, art, and migration, is potentially changing, as you consider your writing?

IS: I want to work on manhood in my next work. Manhood and womanhood are huge issues. I am very interested in gender. I was interested in Somali women above all and Black women characters because I wanted to speak about the violence against women's bodies. Then people asked, "Why are there no men in your books?" There is Zoppe in *Adua*. Now, the grandfather in *Figli dello stesso cielo* speaks about being a Black man. Maybe in my new book, there will be a lot of characters, men and women. In general, I am interested in relationships. The thing I want to add more of in my next book is Islam. I do not want to speak about religion, but about what happens to our bodies during the diaspora experience. A terrible moment for the world is 9/11, because of people dying in the Twin Towers, but also because we lived our religion in a normal way until 9/11 and then we became terrorists. For Somalia, a lot changed after 9/11. I want to think about the meaning of this moment in terms of normal people, not terrorists, and for diaspora people. I do not usually face this in my life or literature. I just faced it with a Charlie Hebdo letter I wrote.<sup>2</sup> It was so painful. I want to think about this aspect of the Somali diaspora because it is a big aspect of it. You cannot think about the diaspora without thinking about religion. It is a huge part of the experience. I am in a moment in my life where I want to put a lot of things together in my literature, but I have to choose. It is hard to choose.

<sup>2</sup>See Scego's "Not in my name" translated by Aminda R. Leigh.